TL 1081

A RECENT EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

Human rights in East Timor

Student demonstration moves into Hotel Turismo, Dili, where they spoke to the US Ambassador to Indonesia, John Monjo.

On January 17 1990 Indonesian security personnel brutally repressed a peaceful pro-independence demonstration by East Timorese students in Dili. The demonstration was directed to the US Ambassador, Mr John Monjo, in a plea for US support.

The dispersal of the demonstration was observed by a number of foreign witnesses including Mr Monjo's aides, officials of the International Red Cross, and several tourists.

The following account is from two of those witnesses, Andrew McMillan and Jenny Groves, who were holidaying in East Timor from Darwin, Australia at the time.

On Wednesday 17 January 1990 US Ambassador to Indonesia John Monjo flew into Dili to begin a scheduled three day visit to East Timor.

At midday the Ambassador and his entourage arrived at the Hotel Turismo on the esplanade. Minutes later between 80 and 100 chanting students moved into the Hotel's front courtyard and occupied the balcony of the Hotel's eastern wing.

The students unfurled banners (many of them written in English) calling for justice, peace, and independence for East Timor: "Independence or Dead. Integration No and Never. Indonesia Go Out From Our Country." *(Quoted in the official Antara news on January 26 1990, Indonesian Brigadier General Nurhadi Purwasaputro claimed that only 20 youths took part in the demonstration.)*

Within two or three minutes six soldiers armed with rifles trotted into the Hotel's beer garden and faced the students on the balcony. Five or six rocks were thrown at the soldiers by students on the balcony. Two of the soldiers threw rocks back at the students. A small number of students, perhaps eight in all, entered the beer garden with a banner. Three of these students were apprehended by the soldiers who kicked, punched and beat them with rifle butts.

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Minutes later the US Ambassador, flanked by aides and Indonesian officials, appeared at the entrance to the Hotel. Initially he spoke with the demonstrators face to face in the courtyard before withdrawing about three metres to the Hotel's entrance. Further discussions were conducted via megaphones.

Demonstrators in the front courtyard, led by Augusto Nasario, addressed the US Ambassador in Bahasa Indonesia through a megaphone. They apologised for the disturbance, outlined a range of human rights abuses they claimed had been perpetrated by the Indonesians since the annexation of East Timor in 1975, claimed that up to 200,000 East Timorese people had been killed since the Indonesian invasion, and told the Ambassador that it was likely that they would be persecuted or killed for taking part in the demonstration.

The Ambassador, speaking in Bahasa Indonesia through a megaphone provided by Indonesian officials, told the students that he would pass on their grievances to officials in the US and Indonesian governments.

The US Ambassador spent an hour listening to and talking to the students. Throughout this period, Indonesian military and civil officials cooperated with the Ambassador and the students, giving the impression that free speech was a right in East Timor.

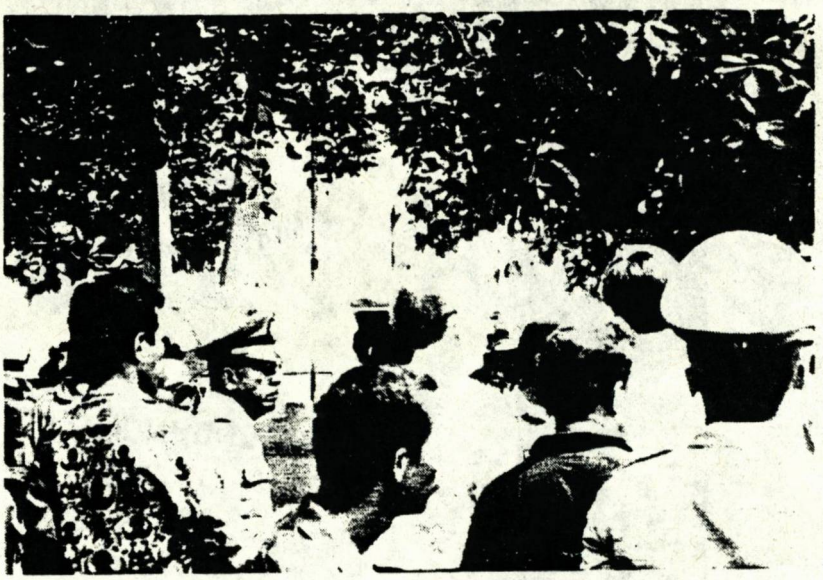
During these discussions, most of which were conducted by megaphone, the students were photographed, videotaped and noted by at least three plain-clothes indonesian officials.

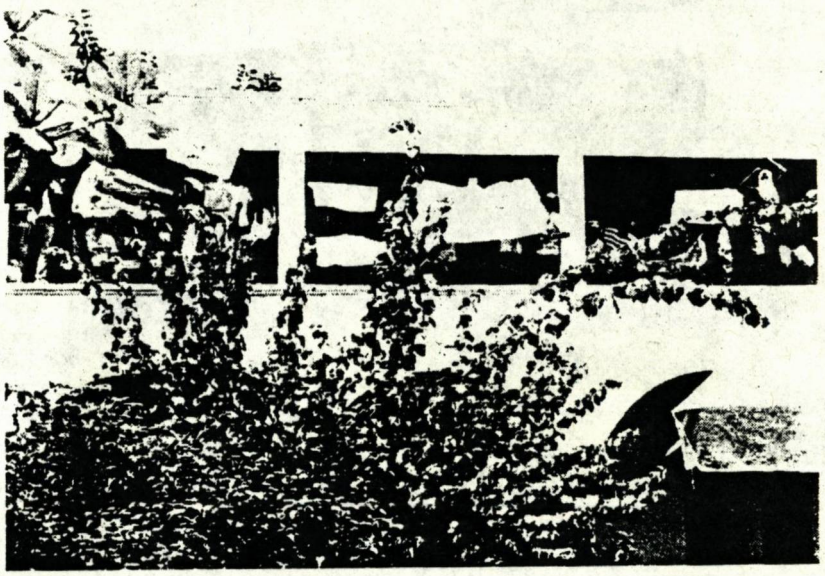
At the same time, at least three truck-loads of "Polisi" (wearing helmuts, webbing, riot shields and batons) formed up on the esplanade at a distance of 20 metres either side of the entrance to the Hotel Turismo.

As the Ambassador (who was due to attend a meeting with the Provincial Governor) left the Hotel in a red Toyota Corolla at about 1:45pm, students - many of whom were now wearing face masks- surged beside and behind the car in order to gain safe passage away from the Hotel.

[Contrary to a subsequent statement by Indonesia's Ambassador to Australia, the students did not try to block the way of the Ambassador's car.]

Initially the students who were following the car were restrained with a minimum of force. However, when the Ambassador's car was 50 metres away, and the students were on the footpath and road immediately in front of the Hotel Turismo, squads of riot





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police charged at the crowd, beating them with batons and rifle butts.

Some students managed to escape. As the police closed in, about 40 were beaten and clubbed into a human pile against the Hotel's iron fence. Many were streaked with blood. Students who scaled the fence and sought refuge amongst the tourists and two diplomats sheltering at the entrance to the Hotel were chased, kicked and beaten by soldiers with M-16 rifles before they could reach the lobby.

As the police on the street continued to run amok, bashing the students with batons, senior officials stepped in and tried to restrain them.

One body, that of a young man , was dumped onto the tray of a grey police truck. A red flag was tossed over his face.

As the police were withdrawn, students disentangled themselves from the human pile and started praying. Local officials dumped buckets of sand over the pools of blood on the road.

Police climbing into the back of the truck containing the body, kicked the body out of their way. The body did not respond.

Two International Red Cross workers arrived on the scene, explaining that they had to be there because weapons were being used.

The students, many of whom were streaked with blood and crying, retrieved bloodied sandshoes and other footwear from the road and then straggled towards Bishop Belo's house two doors from the Hotel.

[According to the Indonesian ambassador to Australia, "two of the youths received several wounds on their heads and immediately were taken to hospital... the wounded were taken care of at the local hospital and taken home." This is contrary to our observation of one body being left unattended in the back of a truck for at least 15 minutes].

[An American national, who resides in Dili as the representative of a Catholic Aid organisation, informed US diplomats on the afternoon of the demonstration that two people had been killed. One according to his report, had been beaten to death; the other, mortally wounded by gunfire, had fled into the residence of International Red Cross workers next door to the Hotel and had died there, vomitting blood and the bullet that hit him. It was claimed that Indonesian soldiers kicked in the door to the house and retrieved the body. It is understood that the US Ambassador subsequently visited the house and saw evidence of the incident].

[Other foreigners who were in Dili at the time and witnessed the violence heard stories of people being killed but were unable to verify those stories. Their understanding is that two students with severe head wounds were hospitalised in the local military hospital].

[Subsequent reports from the Jakarta-based Institute for Defence of Human Rights indicated that three students were killed during the demonstration and that up to seven students had gone missing].

Immediately after the demonstration and the subsequent violence two US diplomats approached us and questioned us about what we had seen. We spoke to them for a couple of hours. During these discussions they registered their sense of shock at what had happened to the students. They gave the impression of being deeply disturbed by what had transpired. That evening, over dinner in the Hotel Turismo's dining room, the topic of conversation at the diplomatic party's table rarely veered from the violent events of the afternoon.

US Ambassador John Monjo cut his visit to East Timor short and left Dili the following afternoon, January 18. It is understood that he pleaded with local authorities not to further harass the students involved in what had started out as a peaceful demonstration. At a subsequent demonstration outside the Governor's residence on the evening of the US Ambassador's departure there were no reports of violence.

Andrew McMillan
Jenny Groves
Darwin, February 1990

Andrew & Jenny both signed affidavits of what they had witnessed in Dili and Andrew testified at the U.N. Human Rights Commission Hearings in Geneva in Feb. 1990